

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 PM-03 OMB-01 MC-02 EB-07 COME-00

TRSE-00 AID-05 IGA-01 PRS-01 CIAE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00

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P R 241450Z JUN 75

FM AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7150

INFO SECDEF

USCINCSO

AMCONGEN BELIZE

AMEMBASSY LONDON

C O N F I D E N T I A L GUATEMALA 3240

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MASS, GT

SUBJECT: GUATEMALAN AIR FORCE PURCHASE OF C-47'S

RE: (A) GUATEMALA 3217 (NOTAL), (B) STATE 146420 (NOTAL),
(C) GUATEMALA 2906 (NOTAL)

SUMMARY: ARMED FORCES COS TOLD AMBASSADOR THAT "LONG DELAY" IN US
REPLY TO GUATEMALAN REQUEST TO PURCHASE USED C-47'S "CANNOT
HELP BUT COOL RELATIONS." HE REPEATED ASSURANCES OF
FOREIGN AND DEFENSE MINISTERS THAT GOG HAS NO PLANS TO INVADE
BELIZE, WHICH WOULD BE "SUICIDAL" AS LONG AS BRITISH TROOPS
ARE THERE, AND SAID GUATEMALA FULLY COMMITTED TO DIPLOMATIC
SOLUTION AS LONG AS THERE IS NO UNILATERAL GRANT OR
DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE IN BELIZE. END SUMMARY

1. GENERAL ROMEO LUCAS, CHIEF OF STAFF
OF THE ARMED FORCES, CALLED ON AMBASSADOR JUNE 20 TO STRESS
GUATEMALA'S "GREAT INTEREST" IN OBTAINING C-47'S IT HAD REQUESTED
FROM US, BUT ALSO ITS GREAT INTEREST IN GETTING A
DEFINITE ANSWER SOON ONE WAY OR ANOTHER. LUCAS SAID HE HAD
HEARD FROM MILITARY ATTACHE IN WASHINGTON THAT DEPART-
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MENT WAS CONCERNED ABOUT GUATEMALAN PURCHASE OF ISRAELI

ARAVAS AND HE SOUGHT APPOINTMENT WITH AMBASSADOR IN ORDER TO EXPLAIN GUATEMALAN INTENTIONS. HE THOUGHT CONCERN MIGHT BE RELATED TO MILITARY BALANCE IN CENTRAL AMERICA, AND HE BEGAN COMPARISON OF NEIGHBORING AIR FORCES. AMBASSADOR SAID THAT ON CONTRARY, WASHINGTON'S CONCERN WAS OVER VELIZE AND WHAT GOG PLANNED TO DO WITH AIRCRAFT IT IS ACQUIRING. IT IS UP TO GUATEMALA WHERE IT BUYS ITS MILITARY EQUIPMENT - US IS NOT IT ONLY SUPPLIER AND DOESN'T PRETEND TO BE. BUT WHAT DOES IT INTEND TO DO WITH ALL THESE PLANES? WHERE WILL IT GET NECESSARY PILOTS AND MAINTENANCE MEN? (LATTER QUESTION NEVER ANSWERED.)

2. C-47'S, LUCAS SAID, ARE NEEDED FOR NEXT FEW YEARS FOR PURPOSES STATED TO AMBASSADOR LAST MARCH - TO MOVE MEN AND EQUIPMENT AROUND COUNTRY ON INTERNAL FLIGHTS AND TO GIVE GAF ENOUGH PLANES TO ATTRACT BACK INTO SERVICE PILOTS WHO HAD GONE OFF TO PRIVATE COMPANIES BECAUSE AIR FORCE COULD NOT GOVE THEM PLANES TO FLY. BUT US IS NOT MAKING ANY MORE C-47'S, SPARE PARTS ARE INCREASINGLY DIFFICULT TO OBTAIN, AIRCRAFT WILL NOT BE AVAILABLE FOREVER. IN ADDITION C-47'S ARE NOT RPT NOT STOL AND CANNOT FLY TO ALL AREAS THEY ARE NEEDED. THEREFORE GUATEMALA ALSO NEEDS ARAVAS.

3. PRIMARY USE OF ARAVAS WILL BE IN CONNECTION WITH PLANNED NATIONAL FORST RESERVE IN SOUTHWESTERN PETEN, AREA OF SOME 8,000 CABALLERIAS (1400 SQUARE MILES) THAT ARMY WANTS TO SET ASIDE FOR REFORESTATION AND CONSERVATION PROJECTS, PROTECT FROM SETTLEMENT AND SLASH-AND-BURN AGRICULTURE, AND USE AS TRAINING AREA FOR ARMY RANGERS. (COMMENT: THIS IS PET PROJECT OF GENERAL LUCAS; HOW GOOD ITS CHACNES OF REALIZATION MAY BE IS NOT CLEAR.) STOL CAPABILITY OF ARAVAS WILL ENABLE THEM TO BE USED ON SHORT AIRSTRIPS BOTH IN THE RESERVE AND IN NEARBY AREAS WHICH WILL UNDERGO MUCH DEVELOPMENT IN NEXT FEW YEARS WITH EXPANSION OF PETROLEUM PRODUCTION.

4. AMBASSADOR SAID US WANTS TO ENCOURAGE PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT OF BELIZE QUESTION. WE CONFIDENTIAL

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ARE STRONGLY OPPOSED TO ANYTHING THAT WOULD EVEN APPEAR TO CONTRIBUTE TO A MILITARY ADVENTRURE. BUT EQUALLY STRONGLY, WE DON'T WANT TO GET CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE BETWEEN GUATEMALA AND BRITISH OVER BELIZE. ONE SURE WAY TO BE CAUGHT WOULD BE TO PROVIDE TOOMANY AIRCRAFT FOR WHICH THERE IS NO CONVINCING PEACEFUL USE. SPECIFICALLY, THE POSSIBILITY OF A PARACHUTE DROP ON BELIZE AIRPORT IS VERY MUCH IN OUR MINDS.

5. LUCAS SAID " THAT WOULD BE SUICIDE" IN FACE OF
BRITISH GUNS AND AIRCRAFT. "SHIPS COULD COME IN AND
BLOW US TO PIECES." GOG HAS NO PLANS TO ATTACK BELIZE;
ON CONTRARY, IT IS COMMITTED TO DIPLOMATIC EFFORTS TO
GET A SOULUTION GROUNDS ACCEPTABLE TO GUATEMALA, I.E.,
CONTROL OVER THE SEA APPROACHES TO AMATIQUE BAY.

6. OF COURSE, LUCAS SAID, GUATEMALAN ARMY HAS BEEN
JUSTIFYING ITS SALARY FOR YEARS ON GROUNDS IT WOULD
AND COULD MOVE IN AND TAKE BELIZE (PRESUMABLY FOLLOWING
DEPARTURE OF BRITISH) IF THERE WERE UDI OR BRITISH
GRANT OF INDEPENDENCE WITHOUT AN AGREEMENT WITH GUAT-
MALA MEETING LATTER'S NEEDS. GOG ALSO AWARE THAT
BELIZE IS DEVELOPING TIES WITH FORMER BRITISH COLONIES ELSEWHERE IN T
HE
CARIBBEAN AND HAS CONTACTS WITH CUBA, AND THAT LEVEL OF
POVERTY AND UNDERDEVELOPMENT IN BELIZE IS SUCH THAT IT IS RIPE FOR
CUBAN INFILTRATION. IF A COMMUNIST GOVERNMENT CAME TO POWER IN
BELIZE, GUATEMALA WOULD HAVE TO INTERVENE. SO LUCAS COULD NOT RPT
NOT SAY THAT UNCER NO CIRCUMSTANCES WOULD GUATEMALA ATTACK.
BUT HE COULD TELL US THAT NEITHER C-47'S OR ARAVAS WERE FOR THAT
PURPOSE

7. LUCAS SAID GUATEMALA REALLY FELT IT OUGHT TO HAVE
A PROMPT ANSWER TO ITS REQUEST FOR C-47'S. IF THE ANSER IS NO,
IT WILL WANT TO USE MONEY IT HAS SET ASIDE FOR OTHER
PURPOSES AND MAKE OTHER PLANS TO MEET ITS NEEDS. SPEAKING
FRANKLY, HE SAID, THE LONG DELAY CANNOT HELP BUT COOL
US RELATIONS WITH GUATEMALAN ARMED FORCES. AMBASSADOR SAID
MATTER UNDER ACTIVE CONSIDERATION IN WASHINGTON AND WE
WOULD REPORT GENERAL LUCAS' VIEWS.

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8. COMMENT: WE SUSPECT THAT LUCAS WAS
ACTING ON ISTRUCTIONS ROM PRESIDENT LAUGERUD. HIS
CHOICE FOR THE MISSION, IN LIGHT HIS PAST AVERSION TO
SUBSTANTIVE CONVERSATIONS WITH US OFFICIALS, GIVES SUPPORT
TO REPORTS HE IS DESTINED TO BECOME MINISTER
OF DEFENSE SHORTLY.

9. DESPITE VARIOUS HOLES AND WEAKNESSES IN LUCAS'
ARGUMENT, EMBASSY CONTINUES BELIEVE, AS STATED REF. A,
THAT WE HAVE GOTTEN AS MUCH AS WE ARE GOING TO GET ON
GUATEMALAN INTENTIONS WITH REGARD BOTH TO USE OF AIRCRAFT AND
TO BELIZE, AND WE CONTINUE TO RECOMMEND
MODIFIED SALE SISCUSSED REF. C. IN ANY EVENT, WE SHOULD
GIVE GOG AN EARLY ANSWER.
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